

Time to hit snooze on the Doomsday Clock

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Body

I hope you're sitting down for this in an underground bunker.

Humanity is as close as we've ever been to annihilation. This jolly news arrived Tuesday in Washington, where the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists lifted a black veil from their symbolic clock to reveal we are "90 seconds to midnight."

That might sound like a Sandra Bullock sequel that co-stars a bus. But these scientists are deadly serious. Midnight represents Armageddon. Once the clock strikes 12, sayonara. And the creeping perils - topped by Russia's barbaric invasion of Ukraine and the threat of thermonuclear war - have lunched us toward Peak Peril.

As Rachel Bronson, the group's president, noted: "We are living in a time of unprecedented danger and the Doomsday Clock time reflects that reality. Ninety seconds to midnight is the closest the clock has ever been set to midnight and it's a decision our experts do not take lightly."

Fair enough. But is it not time to hit snooze on this gloom?

Forget the unprecedented danger. We are also up to our eyes in unprecedeted fear. My dad used to read the newspaper after dinner with a blank expression, like he was skimming the rules to a Hasbro game: Oh, look. They're building a new water treatment plant. Panama has an upcoming election. We should buy a Pet Rock.

Even the really bad news never felt end-of-days bad.

But our doomscrolling is now out of control.

Interest rates are giving us panic attacks. The cost of living is making us feel dead inside. Crime! Pandemic! AI! Disinformation! Climate change!

Doug Ford greenlighting kidney transplants at the Gap!

Paris Hilton is now a mother. How can I not be terrified?

On Wednesday morning, I felt anxious just watching the Weather Network while gathering intel on the promised blizzard. By the way, when did that station start airing mixology segments? I'm tuning in for Doppler radar and accumulation forecasts, you bomb cyclone lunatics, not for maple bourbon cocktails that billow rosewood smoke.

How much sidewalk shovelling can I expect? Give me the actionable data.

This is my problem with the Doomsday Clock. Beyond ratcheting up sales of potassium iodide pills and scaring the living daylights out of us, how is this Ghostface of a clock helping to prevent the apocalypse? If anything, it is

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desensitizing us to looming calamity via inertia and slick press conferences in which this ghoulish psychodrama of a clock is unveiled annually like a luxury cruise prize on a game show.

Some of those nerds were even smirking on Tuesday while lamenting the end.

When the Doomsday Clock started in 1947, catastrophe was calibrated to seven minutes to midnight. The most optimistic year for humanity was 1991, after the United States and former Soviet Union signed the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty.

But even then, at our safest, we were 17 minutes to midnight? In 76 years, the metaphorical time to total destruction has never exceeded an episode of "Friends"?

How is this possible? How is this not fear-mongering?

Can you imagine if there was a Doomsday Clock for relationships? Your wife asks you to take out the stinky trash, you forget, and then she bolts into the den to push forward on the minute hand of the ominous Bulova mounted on the wall.

Mister, we are now 90 seconds to the midnight of divorce!

I don't want to come across as glib or cynical, especially when the fate of humanity hangs in the balance. But I am done with this Doomsday Clock. It should be taken to a Pottery Barn and smashed with a sledgehammer. The people who should be heeding its warnings are the ones who blithely ignore it.

On Wednesday, Reuters published a story about how the Kremlin had "expressed alarm" about the Doomsday Clock ticking closer to midnight. But even though Moscow has hastened our collective demise with illegal aggression and the sabre-rattling of mushroom clouds, the Kremlin is blaming NATO for the existential dread.

Huh? It's as if the Rock punched you in the mouth and demanded dry-cleaning money because your blood got on his sleeve. You know when the Doomsday Clock will start adding time? When sociopaths like Vladimir Putin, with his murderous and imperial delusions, are erased from this fragile planet. When conquest is replaced by a spirit of cohabitation. When "we are all in this together" transcends cheap sloganeering.

But since that hasn't happened yet, maybe we should mothball the Doomsday Clock and solve problems, one at a time, without feeling like Freddy Krueger is lurking in the closet with a bladed glove and convoluted assessments of extreme weather.

We need leaders and scientists from every discipline to navigate our way out of the labyrinth of possible destruction. What we don't need is a jump-scare timepiece that adds zero actionable data in our quest for survival.

Telling the world we are doomed does nothing to lessen the doom.

And if we ever strike midnight, who will adjust the time?

The Doomsday Clock is both performative and pointless.

Bill Gates recently said he is "very optimistic" about the future. This dovetails with the brilliant work of cognitive psychologist Steven Pinker, who routinely highlights how good we have it today despite our fear and loathing.

The Doomsday Clock has been stuck way past 11 p.m. since the Cold War.

It is time to look away and get on with it.

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